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ABSTRACT

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrovsky's book "Ways of Reading" creates a paradox for readers, for a primary thesis of the book is that there should be no standard or traditional readings to which a new reader must conform. A successful reader will interrogate and dispute the text at every turn. The book's organization mirrors the authors' commitment to the inseparability of reading and writing. Students are not relegated to the margins of the text: their work is in as privileged a position as that of the other writers represented in the book. Some complexities of the book stem from its attempt to make a radical departure from other freshman composition textbooks. It is difficult to locate the agenda behind the publication of "Editor's Notes," a guidebook for teachers using "Ways of Knowing" that offers teachers the way to "read" the material in the book. The authors' pedagogy falls apart when taken too far. There are some standards that must be followed, they seem to say, some basic ideas that are irrefutable. "Ways of Reading" is unique in its perspective. It privileges reading over writing and students over teachers. (Three notes are included.) (RS)

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Another Way: Answering Ways of Reading

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Another Way:
Answering Ways of Reading

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> Let us . . . cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think speak, and write . . .
>
> John Adams

> [T]o alienate men from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.
>
> Paulo Freire

It is easy to be intrigued by a text that announces its pedagogy in its title. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky title their book Ways of Reading, and that is simultaneously what it teaches, what it argues for, and what it renders itself vulnerable to. The title of this "Anthology for Writers" acknowledges in three words that there does exist, and should exist more than one valid "way" to read. This assures that the book itself will respect the value of individual "ways" of responding to it. The title of this textbook demands that its content and pedagogy are challenged. It posits a theory that can only be proven by the reader's questioning of its own value. A reader, student or teacher, who automatically accepts the theories and philosophies behind Bartholomae and Petrosky's work is creating a paradox, for a primary thesis of the book is that there should be no standard or traditional readings to which a new reader must conform. In this, a successful reader (in the Bartholomaen/Petroskian sense) will interrogate and dispute the book at every turn. The author's pedagogy demands that their textbook receive diverse responses, that it is spoken back to by an individual as it is read. I would like to construct my "way of reading" Petrosky and Bartholomae with this in mind. There is no way to examine this book in anything but a personal way, because that is how it defines itself. By pluralizing the first word of its title it imagines its audience and their responses in the plural.

It is difficult to place Ways of Reading in a historical perspective. It is a textbook that seems to refuse any connection with previous textbooks, while it simultaneously aligns itself with many conflicting schools of thought. It makes no explicit mention of writing-process, of work as a community of writers, of writing as meaning maker, yet it intrinsically employs all of these ideas. Thus Ways makes some assumptions about the history of writing theory, assumptions that seem to say that the reader is aware of, and understands where pedagogy has been, and where these authors wish to validate or refute it. It seems, not to speak to pedagogies before it at all, but to construct itself along side of them. The book then places itself, views itself as running on a separate line than the traditional pedagogy of writing theory; for its vision is one of developing a new curriculum where reading and writing are not supports for one another, but distinct parts of a whole educational process.

The book's organization mirrors this commitment to the inseparability of reading

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and writing. Petrosky and Bartholomae attempt to group the two acts right from the cover of the book. The words "reading" and "writer" exist in the same periphery on the jacket of the text. There is then the suggestion that the "readings" are for the writer, and vice-versa. The editors seem to want to shift the concerns of composition courses from ones almost exclusively interested in writing tasks to a balance of the disciplines of writing and reading. The textbook echos this model of this class. There is no distinction made between a "reading section" and a "writing section," for "Assignments For Writing," "Making Connections" and "Questions For A Second Reading" are included after each essay or story. These questions ask students, each differently, to consider their reading of the text as they reread/rewrite/rethink its precepts--and their own. This allows the reading act and the writing act to join into an intellectualization act. Students will then, ideally, come to realize that writing is a means by which to understand reading and vice versa. For example, following the essay by Studs Terkel "*Roberta Victor* and *Eric Nestrenko*" a "Question For A Second Reading" encourages students to

> ask yourself what the dominant metaphors are for each of these persons. How might these metaphors be regarded as key factors in both individuals' understanding of their own experience? Bring these metaphors forward, and use them as tools in an investigation of how both Victor and Nestrenko see the world (505)

This is an obvious break from the traditional follow-up questions in Freshman Anthologies that seem almost to contain the answers within the confines of the questions. Following Virginia Woolf's essay "What if Shakespeare Had Had A Sister?" one textbook, for example, asks students to, "Explain the link Woolf makes (paragraph 9) between chastity and the problem of the gifted woman writer"(Abcarian and Klotz 368). The differences between the tones of these two questions say it all. Bartholomae and Petrosky give students credit for understanding the idea of metaphor, and recognize their ability to use it to increase their understanding of a complex text. They ask students to use a text as a "tool" to help themselves. This radically changes the location of the student as compared to the Abcarian and Klotz question. While Klotz and Abcarian's queries may be useful ways to focus Woolf's essay, they do not place the student as a questioner, but as an answerer of questions. With the choice of the word "explain" comes a suggestion that there is a definite "thing" to be explained, that there is an answer. The problem with this is that there is an implied ending to the process. Once the student has gone back to the place in the text that the editors have noted, then they can "find" the answer and the examination will be finished. Bartholomae and Petrosky ask students to do their work locating moments in the text, and then use this work to further their project, one of reading and writing, thinking and supposing: the project of making personal meaning out of a text.

Following the "Questions For A Second Reading" are the "Assignments For Writing." These assignments are lengthier, and the title of the section implies that the answers will be more formal than those of "Questions For A Second Reading." Bartholomae and Petrosky see this stage in the creation (of meaning) process as suggesting "a way for you to reconsider the stories or essays: they give you access from a different perspective. The assignments also encourage you to be strong readers and actively interpret what you have read"(14). The authors imagine the student's <u>writing</u> encouraging them to be strong <u>readers</u>. This is no small departure from the pedagogies of those theorists that believe in beginning writing projects from what one knows as a writer. This textbook places students in a position where they may know almost nothing about the subject (Freudian psychology or Geertzian anthropology) and positions them as expert readers. The editors assume that students will keep reading

until they are somewhat "expert" at the selection at hand. Bartholomae and Petrosky, as evidenced by the basic organization of their textbook, begin by what one knows as a reader.

Besides integrating the reading of and writing about a text into one lucid act, "working with" the text, Bartholomae and Petrosky also synthesize their text in its organization. By placing projects for the students to work through in the same section in which the essays and stories reside, they are inviting the students into the discourse of professional writers. There is an enactment of the pedagogy they espouse in their introduction, "they [the essays and stories] leave some work for the reader to do"(9).

> We'd like you to imagine that when you read the essays and stories we've collected here, somebody is saying something to you, and we'd like you to imagine that you are in a position to speak back , to say something of your own turn (2).

Bartholomae and Petrosky don't waste a moment allowing the students to do just this. It is important that they do not force the readers to wait beyond the bounds of a text to respond to that text. In this, the written responses to the text are in the same "unit" as the original story or essay. The implication is that the reading act isn't complete only because the initial reading is done. Writing is essential to do a strong reading. The authors are dispelling a commonly believed myth of reading assignments in many kinds of classes, that once you have read the assignment you have completed the job. In their turn away from this Bartholomae and Petrosky can show that revision prevails in reading, in writing, and in understanding.

The students also, aren't relegated to the margins of the text. Their work is in as privileged a position as that of the other writers represented in Ways of Reading. The sequenced assignments are in the concluding position of the book, but three other sections of reading/writing/thinking tasks are with the selected essays and stories. Bartholomae and Petrosky appear deliberate in their efforts to include the student in their discourse. There is no sense that the authors of the text and the teacher of the class are looking over the student's head and nodding, that they are ascribing to the "we know what is good for you" idea. The student involves him or herself in the pedagogies that are in this textbook. In fact, the Introduction to the text is

> addressed to the teachers; it speaks of the design of the book and the assumptions about reading, writing, and teaching that have informed our work. The Introduction is addressed to students. It is also, however, a demonstration of how we have learned to talk to our students about reading and writing, about their work and ours (Editors' Notes 1). [1]

The "Editors' Notes" also suggest that teachers make the first assignment of the class to read, think about, and discuss the pedagogies that inform this book.

This is a very important first move for a textbook. By offering the students the pedagogical locations that shape their learning, the authors can place responsibility for that learning with the students. Since the students are conspicuously aware of why the text is written, organized, and presented the way that it is, they are challenged to speak to the text, not as if it were an icon of indisputable wisdom, but as the editors' encourage them to speak back to all texts--critically, thoughtfully, and unashamedly. Ways of Reading exudes a certain type of confidence precisely because it renders itself vulnerable to this type of critical interpretation. It presents challenges not only through the texts that it contains, but in itself as a text. Suggesting, in the "Editors' Notes," that the first assignment in a class with Ways as its text might be to discuss the introduction to the book alerts student and teacher that they (Bartholomae and Petrosky) are supremely conscious that their pedagogical location is not all-encompassing, entirely air-tight; but, much the opposite, that there are conflicting ways to read what they have to say. They have conceived a text, not as a divine creation

but as a product of the people who made it.

After the initial presentation of their theories behind the composition of this textbook, Bartholomae and Petrosky place labels on what they see as antithetical tactics to what they label as "strong, aggressive, labor intensive reading," the kind of reading Ways advocates. They present various ways that "reading to locate meaning" or "reading for information" aren't always the most fruitful. This is significant because it imagines that students will identify these approaches to texts, see their inherent shortcomings, and become devotees of the types of ways of reading the editors' admire. This implies that, to some extent, there are "right" and "wrong" ways to approach a text. Though the editors' give a nodding reference to the idea that there are instances when reading to gain information, or reading for main ideas may be valuable, they seem to grant this only lip-service. They note that:

> A danger arises in assuming that reading is only a search for information or main ideas. These are ways of thinking through problems and working with written texts which are essential to academic life but which are not represented by summary and paraphrase or by note-taking and essay exams (7 my emphasis).

The editors' go on to note that student readers take a large responsibility in making the meaning out of the text that lies before them. They show how this "danger" can be avoided, but only in an active attempt by the student.

The "danger" with this juxtaposition of ideas is that Bartholomae and Petrosky are assuming that the way they "read" typical ways of reading will be immediately adopted by the student, that their theories will be accepted. Though their point is not to settle for easy answers from texts, easy answers are precisely what they wish this text (their text) to offer. Their use of the metaphor of danger for the methods of reading they do not admire leaves little room in which the student may speak back to their position. It will be hard for the student not to see Petrosky and Bartholomae's points as "dangerous" for the word is so prohibitive. They do, however, qualify themselves by noting that they find "danger" in "only" reading in these limiting ways. This somewhat saves Petrosky and Bartholomae from refuting their own theories. It doesn't, though, to turn back their words on themselves, "leave [much] work for a reader to do"(9).

Still, part of the fascination of Ways of Reading is its contradictions. Just when it seems to be leaning too far in one direction, it doubles back on itself in a completely unexpected manner. Soon after the editors' appear to push back from their theories, they reaffirm them in as convincing a manner as ever. They use Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature" as another metaphor, this time not one of ominous danger, but of text. With Percy's essay as a stand in for all "valuable" texts, they brilliantly show how textual tensions, not pat answers can reveal strong readings. They describe the inherent weaknesses of taking shortcuts through difficult texts, of asking teachers or consulting secondary sources to "get at" the meaning of Percy.

> To search for information, or to ignore the rough edges in search of a single, paraphraseable idea, is to divert attention from the task at hand, which is not toremember what Percy says but to speak about the essay and what it means to you,the reader. In this sense, the Percy essay is not the sum of its individual parts, it is, more accurately, what its readers make of it (8).

In this they extend the importance of reading Percy far more than anything he might say, into how readers might use anything they read.

Some compexities of Ways of Reading stem primarily from its attempts to make such a radical departure from other Freshman Writing Textbooks. In this, Bartholomae and Petrosky seem to feel that they must exist in a seperate sphere than the other books. It is shocking when flipping through Ways of Reading to find that there is no mention of Writing Process, at least no explicit mention. Conspicuously absent from the pages of

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this book are exhortions on the values of rewriting, language about the recursiveness of language, or suggestions of when another reader should look at a student text. It is almost as if Bartholomae and Petrosky, in emphasizing the importance of slow and careful reading and rereading, ignore the value of slow and careful writing and rewriting. In their pedagogical theories, though, this is how it must be. To discuss and prove the value of different types of reading skills, different kinds of writing skills can't be given the same sort of attention. Petrosky and Bartholomae must be well aware that there are endless numbers of textbooks that they may respect for their mastery at discussing this very thing. They obviously did not feel the world "needed" another "Writing Process" or "Experiential" or "Formalist" Freshman English Textbook.[2]

In many ways Petrosky and Bartholomae are brilliant in foregrounding reading over writing in their textbook. The writing portions, though, could have been prepared more diversely. In the preface to sequence seven, "What are we talking about when we talk about love?" Students are asked to"comment on what different people talk about when they talk about love"(617). They are then presented with two short stories and an interview that, ideally, they have read several times and responded to in various forms. The following three assignments then ask students to write about their understanding of love as the characters (or for Ted and Ellie Graziano, the people) in the texts view it. All the assignments sound very much alike. The first assignment, examining Carver, offers a long quote from the text and then asks students to respond to some of these questions: "What are these people talking about? . How do they explain love, . . . what do they talk about when they talk about love?"(618) and finally requires students to "Write an essay in which you address these questions. What is love to each of these people? What are they trying to say to each other about it?"(618). Assignment two asks "Write an essay in which you discuss what these passages tell you about the Granzianos and and (sic) how they understand love"(619). Finally, sequence three on Saul Bellow's "A Silver Dish" assigns students to "Write an essay in which you characterize Woody's love for the different people in his life, especially for his father, Morris" (620). These assignments are so repetitive, both within themselves and compared to one another, that it would be incredibly difficult for a student to focus their way of reading these texts in any manner but the way the book's editors see them. In fact, Bartholomae and Petrosky themselves admit in their Preface to the text that "The questions we have written highlight what we see as central textual or interpretive problems"(preface, v). In this, there seems a refutation of the very theories that govern this book, that a strong way of reading a text leaves work for the reader to do; not the editors of the book. They are focussing the readings as they feel is valuable, leaving little room for a student voice.

The Love Sequence discussed above is a clear example of a sequenced or gradually building reading assignment. What this text does not do, however, is build up its' writing assignments. The above assignments are merely a restatement of one another in application to various texts. There seems no attempt by the questioners to diversify the ways of writing with which the student can accomplish the task. Juxtaposed closely together, these questions seem identical, with only word shifts to disguise their likenesses. In a way, the book does not claim to preach any ethics of writing as it does of reading. It doesn't have anything to say about how students may have previously learned how to write. While it attempts to push against standard ways of reading, it seems conservative in its proposed ways of writing. The editors assume that students have been writing in a manner that they approve of, but they do not articulate this manner.

The textbook does, however, make a claim to the integration of the disciplines of

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reading and writing. This sequence shows no integration. What it does is privilege the act of reading over that of writing. Reading is accepted as difficult and challenging, a task that must be repeated until it can be resolved. These same challenges are not applied to writing, for the assignments are images of one another. The students are asked to complete the same types of writing tasks over several times, only looking at different texts each time. This does not allow for the evolution of one piece of writing, but rather, locates writing as an "aside" to reading. This is contradictory to the body of the book which places writing assignments directly after readings to reinforce the relationship of the two activities.

Contradictions run throughout Ways of Reading. Somehow, it could not be any other way. Bartholomae and Petrosky do not select any texts to be included in the anthology that are not full of contradictions, why then shouldn't their text contradict itself? They apparently find much value in argument, in uneasiness. This may be what they see as the key to reading a text successfully, recognizing its inherent disunity. It is interesting though, that they do not attempt to point out their own contradictions, at least not in so many words. In the Preface to the "Editors' Notes" Bartholomae and Petrosky explain that they have provided this manual as a "guidebook" to a course that adopts their textbook. They then provide themselves with a disclaimer:

> We cannot imagine all the possible ways that the essays might (or should) be taught. The best we can do is speak from our own experience in such courses. If we seem at times to be dogmatic (to be single-minded in saying what should or how it should be done), it is because we are drawing on our own practices as teachers and they are grounded, finally, in our beliefs about what it means to read, write, and teach (i)

With this said, Bartholomae and Petrosky apparently feel they give themselves license to "tell" teachers how their book can be used best.

Bartholomae and Petrosky are directive in the opening statements in the Introduction to the "Editors' Notes." They make it clear that their pedagogical positions are outlined in the actual text, and that besides serving this purpose the introduction enacts a way of dialogue that has proven successful for them as teachers. The implication is then, that this packet of information is not for "them." (the students) but to share amongst "ourselves." (They do, though, interestingly enough grant permission to teachers to reproduce any of the "Editors' Notes" for use in the classroom). This is a departure from their previous tactics. If reading is as politically and personally oscillatory as they spend a good deal of time claiming it is, why bother writing a guidebook that summarizes the readings into neat little packages; the very practice they claim to despise? For example, in the selection in the "Editors' Notes" on Freud's "Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotions," Petrosky and Bartholomae alert the teacher,

> The basic argument of this essay is that cultural taboos are like individuals' compulsion neuroses. In both cases, people get caught in emotional binds. They do and don't want to follow the strictures of the compulsion or taboo . . .he illustrates it with cases of three kinds of taboos--"The Treatment of Enemies," "The Taboo of Rulers," and "The Taboo of the Dead" (41).

It is difficult to locate the agenda behind an explanation of this kind. Bartholomae and Petrosky surely don't think that a teacher would be unable to see the divisions of the taboos in the text, for they are clearly subtitled. Even more disconcerting though, is the way they present their "Way of Reading" Freud to a teacher. They underscore their reading of Freud's essay without even a nod to diversified interpretation. All their discussion in the beginning of the book that says, "OK, let's get to work on these essays; let's see what you can make of them"(Preface, v) seems to get completely forgotten when they are given a new audience, teachers.

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brought on by "reading for the main point" or "reading for information," it does not respond to the silencing of the teacher. There isn't enough "space" in this text for students, teachers, authors and editors. The teacher is then marginalized as student and author, student and editor grapple over various texts or assignments on texts. For the teacher who has enough confidence in herself or himself this power struggle from which they are exempt might benefit all. It is not, however, generally experienced teachers that teach Freshman English, especially in large universities. Tenured faculty that have been instructors for years aren't usually teaching composition. It is Doctoral (and in some case Masters) candidates who do the bulk of Freshman Composition instruction. They may not have the "classroom voice" yet to oppose Ways of Reading, and no text can be successful if the teacher cannot have authority over it.

This authority of the text is felt most strongly at the end. It resides in the tone and content of the "Assignment Sequences." It is why I, a second year Teaching Assistant, who thoroughly subscribed to much of the pedagogy implicit in the text, was unable to put the sequenced assignments into use in the classroom. Bartholomae and Petrosky tell the students that "This book brings together some of the most powerful voices of our culture. They speak in a manner that asks for response"(567). Petrosky and Bartholomae may not recognize, at this point, the power of their voice. They ask that their introduction be responded to as any text is responded to, for they want students to disagree and make a space for their own voice in much of the book. When it comes to the end though, the power of the voice of Bartholomae and Petrosky cannot be overridden by student or teacher.

Ways of Reading is unique in its perspective. It privileges reading over writing and it privileges student over teacher. Since there can never be a completely equal balance, there must be things that are foregrounded and things that are left for other texts to forefront. I think Ways of Reading is so important because it chooses to underscore those things that the vast majority of textbooks do not. It looks at a student's reading as the most important part of a class. Students need to be reassured of their importance, even if it usurps part of the teacher's importance. Decisions will always leave an option unused. Petrosky and Bartholomae choose to leave unused that which is traditionally addressed, and go on to break new ground.

Works Cited

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--- "Editors' Notes" to Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers. New York: St.Martin's Press, 1987.

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[1] The awkwardness of this statement may stem from the editors' inability to imagine their audience as students and teachers. They seem to grow uncomfortable in their

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writing when there is a shift of audiences, and are most comfortable talking to students.

[2] They were probably right. Ways is decidedly unlike textbooks that came before it, and that is precisely why it is so valuable.

[3] It may also be merely a sad comment on the state of teachers today. Economically Bartholomae and Petrosky may have felt they had to include a supplement to the book. Teachers are so used to teachers manuals that they may have felt their book would be less marketable without the "Editors' Notes." Besides the fact that we all need to earn a living. Petrosky and Bartholomae may have been sensitive to the fact that they can't get their message to students if teachers are unwilling to select it as a text.

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